

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000662

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2014

TAGS: PHUM YM

SUBJECT: 03/21/2003 DEMONSTRATION -- GETTING THE FACTS
STRAIGHT

REF: A. 03 SANAA 573

B. 03 SANAA 574

C. 03 SANAA 576

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: On the anniversary of the start of the war against Iraq, Yemeni opposition newspapers are recalling the March 21, 2003 demonstration near the U.S. Embassy that resulted in several persons killed and injured after clashes erupted between armed demonstrators and ROYG security forces.

Press reports are claiming demonstrators were fired upon without provocation and printing inflammatory quotes. Embassy eyewitnesses (refs) and the 2003 Country Report on Human Rights for Yemen both noted that armed demonstrators clashed with police. In response to inaccuracies, Embassy will discuss balancing professionalism in journalism with the right to press freedom with both ROYG and newspaper interlocutors. End Summary.

2. (U) The al-Shura weekly, mouthpiece of the Popular Forces Union Party, published 3/17 several reports, op-eds and interviews with the families of those killed in an anti-war demonstration they dubbed "Bloody Friday" near the U.S. Embassy 3/21/2003. One report included a quote from the brother of one killed, "one day I will avenge the U.S. Embassy and George Bush." Several so-called witnesses were quoted saying the demonstrators were entirely peaceful and the ROYG forces were prepared to commit a "massacre" that day, although Embassy eyewitnesses noted that demonstrators came armed (refs). One op-ed piece stated the Embassy's security "turned the demonstration into deadly confrontations," despite only ROYG forces and not/not Embassy security being involved. In fact, the march was stopped by police several blocks from the Embassy, so Embassy security had no interaction with demonstrators. The reports also quoted sources as saying the ROYG reached a settlement with the families to pay them blood money on the condition the families must "give up any other demands."

3. (U) Al-Sahwa weekly, mouthpiece of the Islah party, also reported 3/18 that the 3/21/2003 demonstration was a peaceful one with "no intention of causing any troubles." The article criticized the security forces for "overreacting" and losing patience.

4. (U) The 2003 Country Human Rights Report on Yemen characterizes the incident. Referencing Section 1.a: In March, security forces killed and injured demonstrators after a gunfight broke out between demonstrators and security forces protecting an embassy. Security forces used tear gas and shots in the air to disperse demonstrators. A policeman and 11-year old male citizen reportedly were killed during the shootout (see Section 2.b). Amnesty International (AI) reported that police detained dozens of demonstrators and subjected some to beatings upon arrest (see Section 1.d). The Government had previously allowed several peaceful anti-war demonstrations (see Section 1/b); however, in this instance, the demonstrators, led by pro-Iraqi politicians, initiated violence aimed at an embassy (see Section 2.b). Several members of the security forces were also injured.

5. (C) Comment: The inflammatory reporting appears to be trying to re-write the history of last year's demonstration. The aim is apparently to place the blame on the ROYG security forces and secondarily on the ROYG in general for its cooperation with the U.S. Deputy FM Noman informed the Ambassador on 3/18 that the ROYG was considering action against al-Shura newspaper for being supported by U.S.-based financier Ibrahim al-Wazir (Note: Foreign financing of Yemeni newspapers is against Yemeni law. End Note.) Embassy reminded MFA of human rights considerations in terms of press freedom. (Note: The Country Report on Human Rights in 2001 noted previous ROYG action against al-Shura newspaper. End Note) Ambassador plans to discuss the reporting and responsibilities of professional journalism with persons affiliated with al-Shura on 3/24. End Comment.

HULL